

# Lavant Horticultural Society

## 'Designing Small Gardens'

Wed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### *Annie Guilfoyle*

Award-winning garden designer Annie Guilfoyle combines a successful consultancy, Creative Landscapes, with lecturing and writing on the subject.

She has a long association with West Dean College, where she organises all the garden courses and teaches some of them; she also teaches garden design at Great Dixter.

Internationally, Annie lectures and runs garden design courses in several Europe locations and in the USA.

She imparted this knowledge and experience in an excellent presentation, full of useful information delivered in an appealing way.

The following notes do not do the talk justice, only capturing some of the points Annie made.

She considered the small garden as perhaps the most challenging for a designer, compared to a large area and unlimited budget. The features of a small garden can be used in many settings; indeed, many large gardens are a compilation of smaller ones: e.g. Sissinghurst and, to some extent, Great Dixter.

One theme that Annie mentioned repeatedly in her talk was offsetting main features, such as patios, steps, decking, at an angle of 45° to the perimeter of the garden. This gives the garden an impression of being larger, as the eye is drawn to the longest, diagonal, length. Also, it gives larger spaces for planting, compared to a narrow border surrounding, say, a patio that is not offset. It has the additional benefit that the eye is not taken directly to the other end of the garden, making it appear more complex and larger.

She showed several gardens that she had designed as examples, including:

- East Molesey, Surrey
- Kew This garden measures just 4m x 4m. Evergreens. Decking set at 45°.
- Arundel – again hard landscaping set at 45°, giving deeper spaces for planting.
- Hove This garden shows an example of another theme that Annie mentioned several times: reuse what is already there – in this case an underused swimming pool repurposed as a pond, with the decking giving it a curved edge to dissimulate its origins. Reusing what is already there saves the cost of a great deal of material and of bringing it in or taking it out, as well as being ecologically more sustainable. This garden also has a gate with the start of gravel path leading into the border and, by implication, to another part of the garden, whereas, in fact, it doesn't lead anywhere. The gate is left slightly open – always more inviting.

Water features are important in any garden, no matter how small. Their sound adds another, relaxing, dimension that can distract from noise coming from outside. They also bring in wildlife.

In small garden, you can remove lower foliage from a large garden shrub, so that it looks like a small tree, in proportion to the garden.

Use climbing plants to add another dimension and to extend the flowering period when growing through earlier flowering shrubs.

Korean lilac *Syringa meyeri* is exceptionally fragrant and its size makes it particularly well suited to small gardens.

Use more specialised nurseries for access to a wider choice of plants, mentioning in particular:

- [Burncoose Nursery](#)
- [Bluebell Nursery](#)
- [Hardy's Plants](#)

Colour :

In a small garden go for muted colours, as they will make it feel larger.

Using bright colours will make the space appear even smaller.

Shade plants:

Annie mentioned, amongst others Gillenia and **ferns**, which she considers much underrated.

Use dark foliage plants to set off lighter colours.

Bulbs – excellent for small gardens, as they will make their appearance through other planting and once flowered will then disappear again.

Showing just how small gardening can get, Annie introduced something with many potential sites in our area: pot hole gardening